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Los Angeles Members Release New Report Detailing Important Role of Head Start in Los Angeles and the Potential Impact of Republican Proposal

WASHINGTON – With Congress scheduled to consider legislation reauthorizing Head Start this week, Rep. Henry A. Waxman, Rep. Xavier Becerra, Rep. Linda T. Sánchez, and other members of Congress representing Los Angeles released a report examining how the legislation could affect thousands of low-income children in Los Angeles. The report finds that if Head Start becomes a block grant in California, more than 33,000 Los Angeles children would no longer be guaranteed quality early education and other services that they currently receive.

The report finds that in addition to providing early education, Head Start provides children with health and other services that they may not otherwise be able to access. Today, almost 30,000 Los Angeles children receive preventive and primary care through Head Start and more than 4,000 disabled children receive special education and services. The children enrolled in Head Start in Los Angeles are nearly twice as likely as other low-income children to receive basic medical care and almost four times as likely to receive dental care.

“This report reveals the positive impact of Head Start on low-income children, and demonstrates how much we have to lose if the Republican proposal succeeds,” said Rep. Waxman. “The bill before us this week threatens to destroy a proven, successful school readiness program that serves tens of thousands of low-income children in Los Angeles.”

“Head Start is a highly successful program that needs to be expanded to reach a larger percentage of the eligible population, such as Limited English Proficient (LEP) children,” said Rep. Becerra. “But what Republicans are trying to do is to dismantle this program by moving it toward block grant funding, which would leave the program vulnerable to the priorities that different states have. Republicans are gambling with our children’s future with this experiment.”

“Head Start meets children’s needs through a comprehensive approach that includes pre-school classes, concentrated parental involvement, and health and social services,” said Rep. Sánchez. “It’s clear from this study that the changes being proposed by the Bush Administration would dramatically undermine the overall mission of Head Start. This will negatively impact many California families, especially during this time of state budget deficits.”

“The President is trying to hoodwink the American people into believing that one of the most successful child development programs ever needs to be ‘fixed’,” said Rep. Diane E. Watson. “Head Start isn't broken, but it is under threat from Republican meddling. My constituents have seen the Bush bait and switch before – on education, on the economy, and on prescription drugs. They won't be fooled this time.”

“This report clearly shows the importance of Head Start to the children of Los Angeles,” said Rep. Maxine Waters. “By providing high quality educational and social services, Head Start seeks to deal directly with the many obstacles that impoverished children face. There are many scientific studies that have proven that the Head Start formula is the most successful method for helping low-income students. In fact, children who are enrolled in Head Start are more likely to remain in school and to graduate high school and college than those who do not participate in the program – an accomplishment that all our education programs should strive for. Congress should build on the success of Head Start, instead of pursuing a reckless experiment that will decimate the program and put our children's future in jeopardy.”

“Throughout the years, Head Start has improved the lives of millions of low-income children and their families,” said Rep. Hilda L. Solis. “At a time when our State is going through financial troubles, now is not the time to begin to dismantle Head Start and jeopardize our children's future.”

“Head Start is one of our nation's most important and successful federal early education programs,” Rep. Adam B. Schiff said. “As a parent of two small children, I see first-hand the benefits of early education. As this report shows, if the House Majority is successful in block granting Head Start in California, tens of thousands of Los Angeles County children will lose the federal guarantee that provides for the comprehensive Head Start services they currently enjoy. Instead of block granting Head Start, we should expand it, so more kids can reap the tremendous benefits of early education.” Schiff recently introduced an amendment to the School Readiness Act of 2003 to expand Head Start to include more students.

“Head Start has a long record of success. Turning this program into a block grant program and allowing States to divert funds to other programs, as this legislation proposes, will only hurt thousands of at-risk children living in Los Angeles County,” said Rep. Jane Harman

H.R. 2210, the Head Start reauthorization bill, would block grant federal funding for Head Start in eight states, remove federal requirements to provide certain services, and allow states to reduce their funding for early childhood education. Many fear that this legislation is simply a precursor to block granting the program nationwide. If the Republican proposal is enacted, states may stop offering many of the services now required under Head Start, a move that is more likely in times of severe state budget crises.

The report was prepared by the Democratic staff of the Committee on Government Reform.